TOWN & COUNTRY CHURCH

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The Decentralist Way for Post-War Reconstruction

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Following is the text of an address delivered before the recent meeting of the Committee on Town and Country of the Home Missions Council and the Federal Council. Those hearing it asked for its circulation.

• To discuss this subject intelligently, we must be very clear about what post-war reconstruction is to mean to the church. It will probably mean something quite different to the state. Most of the people, a large percent quite unchurched, will care little about what happens aside from the matter of a job for themselves and security for their families.

Two Reconstructions

I foresee the likelihood of two very different post-war reconstructions; one immediate and emergency in nature, the other long-range, covering perhaps a quarter of a century, and looking to the building of a new and very different world. The church will have a part in the first mopping-up reconstruction. Amelioration is a direct natural outflow of Christ's redemptive love. But the church more than any other institution will be responsible for the latter, a long-range reconstruction. It must address itself specifically to that.

The future of all its world service is bound up in that world-rebuilding. But it is not merely to save itself that the church must launch into this task as never yet in its history, though it can only save itself by losing itself, as its great founder once said; it is this long range world-rebuilding reconstruction that I have in mind. I wish that we might more closely examine it.

This is peculiarly the church's responsibility simply because the issue is clear-cut between "the powers of darkness," operating under the "Prince of this world," and the "Kingdom of God." Let me illustrate.

Two Traditions

I wonder if many stop to think, when they speak of the American tradition or way of life and of the freedoms we cherish, just how that way of life came to its present moment. I see two, not one, early American traditions. All our American history has been the record of conflict between them. They are really antithetical, but it required a really close-knit, complex society to bring out how very antithetical they are. One I call the *freedom tradition*. Many groups were escaping from European tyranny of church or state, and they found a haven here. You know that story. But there is one you do not know so well.

Our history books have always glossed over it. I call it the *trading company tradition*. A great deal of the settlement of this land, even the settling of peoples who were escaping from slavery and seeking freedom, was arranged by trading company agents. The same great East India Trading Company, which carved out for England, its present Indian Empire, had a leading hand in the settlement of the American colonies.

Immoral Man's Society

For a time, when our *freedom tradition* was being specially cherished by our constitution-making forefathers, it appeared that that tradition had prevailed. They did indeed intend "a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," but it was not long before the *trading company tradition* began to prevail over the freedom tradition. We were, as a nation, caught with the pioneer fever of westward-to-success-and-fortune fame. I do not need to reconstruct that period and the Horatio Alger race which it fashioned.

These Papers

BECAUSE of wartime printing conditions, it has been found necessary to issue TOWN AND COUNTRY CHURCH as a bulletin without regular monthly frequency. We expect, however, to be able to make available a series of informal papers, and to print nine of these issues in the course of twelve months, as we had planned and promised. The Committee on Town and Country of the Home Missions Council and the Federal Council of Churches asks you to be patient if copies do not arrive regularly.

Brief stories of what people are doing in local congregations and communities will be the chief features. The aim is to help put the worker in the small community into touch with numerous activities.

Part of Larger Program

The paper will be an important part of an enlarged "cooperative rural church program," that will encourage a national "rural church movement." The paper will be closely linked with a regularly held National Convocation on the Church in Town and Country.

This Issue
No. 7—Part 2
Published April, 1944

The *trading company tradition* had so far prevailed among the common people that a folk-way of success became general which did not even ask what was worth succeeding at. It was only necessary to succeed. Great areas of fertile land were passed over in that westward march and left depleted and wasting in erosion, only because they had been mined for the fortune, which they could quickly yield. So the trading company tradition very widely prevailed. A close study of history, not found in our text books, will bear this out.

Struggle Between Traditions

Now what has happened to our world is that we have now discovered that this struggle between the two traditions was from the first a world struggle. For all our seeming isolation, we were all the time just a part of the great world pattern of trade exploitation, with its waste of human and all other resources, in the world's great game of greed and fortune, which we now call "imperialism." The world crisis is only the extension into world-wide proportions of this issue between freedom and trading company complexes struggling for ascendency in our nature. Which shall it be? Can the Church help the freedom tradition to prevail in all the world? That is the problem with which decentralization is concerned and it is peculiarly the problem of the Church.

Church's Concern

Wendell Thomas, a philosopher of the new age, in his book, *A Democratic Philosophy* said: "We live in two worlds, in the old dominance-competitive order, and in the new scientific-aesthetic order. To a large extent we can reduce our traffic with the old world and cooperate with groups that are building the new." The church's involvement in that old world must be relaxed. Its leadership in this cooperative "scientific-aesthetic" world must be asserted. It is this which, as a decentralist, I would *urge* as the main reconstruction concern of a Town and Country Committee, such as this. It is essentially a rural-life problem, but it concerns cities no less than country. Can the church be led to come clean and pioneer the new order? That is our problem.

What Is Decentralization?

Decentralization, at its philosophical core, asserts the supremacy in organization of life and society of the human spirit. It has only one criteria for institutions of business, government or religion: What do they do to enhance human values? "What is a man profited if he lose his life?" "The Sabbath (all institutionalism) is made for man." Decentralization asks:

> "Why build these cities glorious
> If man unbuilded goes?
> We build the world in vain, unless
> The builder also grows."

Decentralization, then, sets forth a way to live which provides the maximum possibility for growth to human beings. It seeks, at the same time, a way to a free, whole and satisfying life and also, thus positively, a way out of the crisis. It foreshadows in ideological terms a movement for human freedom, probably the greatest yet in history. But, if decentralization in all its ideology prevails, this struggle for freedom—which some have called the "Green Revolution"—will continue, in both its resistance and positive aspects, to rely only upon non-violent means. No movement can take the way of violence without becoming the opposite of decentralist. "Central"ism is the way of dictatorships, coercion, liquidation, regimentation, death. Decentralization is the way of self-control, self-help, liberty, growth, life.

On the walls of each room in the School of Living, its founder, Ralph Borsodi, has hung a framed motto containing words of William James: "I am done with great things and big things, great institutions and big success, and I am for those tiny, invisible, molecular, moral forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which, if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of man's pride."

The Consumer Principle

In at least four main avenues, this philosophy works out into the problem of our modern world.

The first of these facets of teaching is the *application of the consumer principle to economics.* This is possible most directly through the homesteading family. Any act that furnishes food for the table, clothing for the body, or shelter and equipment for life's comfort is an economic act. But it is possible also to apply the consumer principle cooperatively. Here the principle of mutual aid makes it possible for the group to proceed beyond the range of an isolated family by taking over control of economic processes that are already complex.

True consumer cooperation is a part of decentralization. The economic good of a Christian society is to be discovered through the use of consumer cooperation as applied to the whole range of industry, finance, and trade, by the deliberate act of intelligent local groups in extending their control over the whole economic process.

Decentralization in Economics

We should notice that the basic assumption in this notion of a cooperative society is sound. The whole of economics arises out of man's needs or his psychology of value, exactly as a stream arises out of its source. There is, then, no such thing as a vast complex structure of industrialism detached from man or ultimately out of his control or necessarily rendering him proletarian and servile. The wage system, with all our present organization of employers against employees, is not a necessary or vital factor in production.

We have taken it over in our consumer organization, but the wage system of employment in industry is by no means the only possibility for consumer organization. When man has understood and exercised the consumer principle, he will find that he has the power of life or death over all economic arrangements and institutionalized bigness. He will discover that he is the ultimate, as consumer, in all economic processes and money arrangements. This is

the application of the philosophy of Decentralization to economics.

Homesteading

The appropriate beginning of this way to freedom is in homesteading. It is here that people can at once take hold and do something about their enslavement even while their cooperating structure is still in shadowy form. By means of this way of life, people can hold themselves to sovereign control over their destiny, however far-flung their institutions may be extended. Nova Scotia is proving the important bearing which intimate homesteading community life can have upon the development of a cooperative society. I shall say more about the minister as a homesteader later on.

The Fulfillment of Science

The second of these avenues of application is that of *a new attitude toward technological improvement which I call technological considerateness.* Machines and science are to be used more not less and widely distributable, fluid power makes this possible as never before. But the decentralist must not homestead perfunctorily, nor simply buy and sell in cooperative stores as in other stores. He must see the connection between what he does and the whole question of how man is to maintain his sovereignty in his mechanized world. This involves, first, the husbandry of all resources as contrasted with the familiar folk-way of exploitation and waste. It involves, secondly, socialization as the means to end the exploitation of human resources. *Technological considerateness* is impossible, as long as the motive of public service is not substituted for the motive of private or corporate advancement.

Importance of People

Decentralization demands implementation of the motive of public service on the theory that whatever else happens, PEOPLE MUST GROW. It is the only philosophy which organizes man to take up science and technology through mutual aid, while at the same time balancing this new interdependence with the enhancement of sturdy self-reliance and responsibility. It is therefore the answer to the question: Can democracy survive in a technological civilization? Centralist tendencies, even in the interest of the workers or a proletarian minority, are always coercive in method, exploitive in attitude and destructive of responsibility. I have, therefore said repeatedly and with careful thought, that *decentralization is the only true socialization.*

Decentralization begins with the assumption that the earth, with all that is therein, is the people's own. Equal opportunity in land use (agrarian distribution), social (not necessarily state) ownership of all mineral and other deposits of natural resources, democratic control of all production and distribution, through cooperation, and all social and economic planning by an educated adult population *from the bottom*—these form the natural means for progress along the decentralist way. Such is the application of the philosophy of decentralization to modern science.

The Good Life

Third, applied to what is generally called aesthetics, the cultivation of the good and the beautiful, this philosophy stresses *a conception of the wholeness of life* as over against the modern, ugly fragmentalism peculiar to an over-specialized Age. Compare life on an efficient homestead, like that of Mrs. Mildred Loomis in Brookville, Ohio, with life that is divided between tenements, assembly lines and cheap movie houses. Decentralization, as a way of life in family and community, can provide the means for natural and complete development of people. This means, however, a radical shift from a prevalent folk-way of urban veneer-artificiality to one of integrated life-reality. Some day our social psychologists will measure and tell us how much the symptoms of our age, exploitation, war, crime, insanity, are possible because of a deep, inner disease within the straining psychologies of a frustrated human race which cannot know completeness either in work or in play.

Even our educational, social and recreational programs have been compartmentalized from the life they would seek to make whole. We have thus, in the past, only added segments and artificiality to a life we hoped to cure of its artificiality and segmentation. Homesteading and cooperative community life draw upon creative wholeness in the individual and creative good will in the family or community by their demand for intelligent planning by the people of their complete life and destiny.

The Ethic of Brotherhood

The fourth avenue of application approaches the religious. Perhaps it is the essence of the religion of life of our Master. It is *the development of community through the extension of familyhood into neighborliness.* Modern civilization is fragmentary. It produces in man, as chief characteristics, anonymity and atomization. Community is thus cancelled out. Even the family retains only a shell of its original meaning. Society falls apart, at the moment of its maximum technical skill to draw it into oneness. There is no cementing power which can bind it into unity. Decentralization is the fullest application of the democratic principle of unity in diversity.

It finds that bond of unity in what Kagawa, the great Japanese exponent of production for consumption calls "brotherhood economics." People intelligently uniting their common resources to feed, clothe and house themselves and provide themselves with the comforts of civilization are establishing a foundation of brotherhood love which is impossible where they do not make common purpose in these fundamental tasks.

Here is the great ethic of brotherhood, the great undertone without which life's composition appears sharp, staccato and unrelated, confused and unsatisfying. Cooperation, like collectivism, is amoral—neither good nor bad. Thieves have always cooperated to improve their thieving, and the first great modern collectivism was that of capitalistic monopoly.

It is only as applied to the business of affirming life that organized industry or government become good. We can see then why the develop-

ment of cooperative homesteading communities could prove to be a direct implementation of our faith that the Kingdom of God realized would mean a Christian social order. It is thus that the philosophy of decentralization makes its application to the problem of ethics.

The Church's Place

It remains to consider *the church's place in this long-range world-rebuilding.* John, on the Isle of Patmos, faced a world-shaking crisis like our own. All that was central and authoritarian in the faith had been destroyed—the Temple and the holy city, Jerusalem. The basis of physical security, Roman law and order, was also threatened. The very civilization seemed about to roll up like a great scroll. But there appeared, in John and others of his time who were inspired by the Christ triumphant over death, the strange insight that the survival of all that mattered did not depend upon any structure, even of organized religion. It was *the profound faith of the living body of God in a dying world.*

We need that faith, John wrote, "And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God and made ready like a bride attired to meet her husband. And I heard a loud voice, which came from the throne say,

> 'God's dwelling place is among men
> And He will dwell among them
> And they shall be His peoples
> Yes, God himself will be among them.' "

Minister As Homesteader

But what can the minister do? I want to say a few words about the minister as homesteader. Not a few have been so from the beginning. My father was a homesteader. As a Western Kansas circuit rider on small salary, I recall from my earliest remembrance, how he kept a large garden, pigs, a cow, chickens, and a horse to carry him to his distant points. We did our own butchering and curing of meat and Mother put many things into jars. It would have been impossible adequately to feed a large family, which included four growing boys, on my father's salary. But we had much more than good food out of that parsonage homestead. I do not remember that time was ever heavy on our hands or that our idleness was a problem to our parents. I do not know that my father ever considered himself a homesteader. He did not know about consumer cooperation. Probably he did not even fully sense the significance of the way of life he had chosen on his circuit and for his family of growing boys.

Prophetic Role

But the minister today, especially in rural places, faces a challenge which is unique. A crisis of civilization has placed the double-edged sword of delivery peculiarly in his keeping. Will he learn to wield it? He must be more than a homesteader, as an economic part-time arrangement for his own satisfaction. *He must lead his church in this implementation of Christian faith in life.* He can begin by organizing, like a School of Living, the life-teaching function of his church and, within it, he can make his own homesteading example and his cooperative leadership vital features of an all-rounded ministry to his flock. He can make religion very real to his people, if he will try. And, as he does this locally, he can assume, with others who live as he lives, a prophetic role in our nation's and the world's struggle through the "crisis of our age."

The Latest About Farm Security

Representative Harold D. Cooley of North Carolina, has introduced H. R. 4384, which aims "to simplify and improve credit services to farmers and promote farm ownership." The bill is the result of exhaustive study made for many months by a sub-committee of the House Committee on Agriculture. Representative Cooley was the chairman of the sub-committee. It is referred to the Committee on Agriculture of which Representative Hampton P. Fulmer of South Carolina is chairman.

Farmers' Home Corporation

The bill would transfer the services being rendered to the low income farmers of the nation by the Farm Security Administration to the Farmers' Home Corporation, a governmental agency previously authorized but not used. The Farmers' Home Corporation would be authorized to make operating loans to low income farmers who certify that they cannot secure credit from other sources, in order to enable them to purchase livestock, farm equipment and supplies, other farm needs, for the refinancing of indebtedness and for family subsistence. Loans to any one borrower may not exceed $3,500; the rate of interest is fixed at five per cent, and the total loans to be made in any one fiscal year may not exceed $125,000,000.

Tenant Purchase Loans

The bill would authorize the Farmers' Home Corporation to continue the type of loans previously made by the Farm Security Administration for the purpose of enabling tenants to purchase farms. Such loans would be made at four per cent interest with the principal to be repaid over a period of not more than 40 years. A total of $50,000,000 might be loaned during any one fiscal year.

What About It?

The bill prohibits loans to cooperatives. It is too early to know the attitude of the friends of the Farm Security Administration toward the new bill. So far as can be learned, however, it would appear that most of its friends will support the new measure because they believe it represents considerable progress in the development of favorable interest.

Town & Country Church

Published by the Committee on Town and Country, Home Missions Council of N. A., and the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America.

297 Fourth Avenue New York 10, N. Y

15c a copy; nine copies, $1.00

Remit to the Home Missions Council